

1 John

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1 John 4:19 - 21

Vs. 19

- There is an unbreakable link of love between ourselves and God. We love, we are only capable of love, because He first loved us. This does not mean that our love comes as a response to His love for us. That would mean that the source of our love is still within us, something that is ours, something that we own. No. On our own we can do nothing. What it does mean when we say that "we love because He first loved us" is that now He has given us the ability to love as He loves. By His grace, He has gifted us so that we are able to love with the kind of agape love that He loves with, that Christ demonstrated as the example we are to follow. Love is always an act of His grace.
- I once heard a Sunday School teacher say that Jesus could not have meant for us to take the Sermon on the Mount literally because no one can love the way He was calling for, that no one could be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect. Well no, on my own I cannot possibly love the way Jesus requires me to love as laid out in the Sermon. Yes, God loves me just as I am, but He loves me too much to leave me that way. As John has told us, when we confess that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ, our Savior, then God comes into us and wraps Himself around us: God in us and we in Him. NOW we have power that we have never had before. NOW we have wisdom that we have never had before. NOW we can see the world rightly as we were never able to see before. NOW we can love as He loves, which we were never able to do before, because He first loved us.

Vss. 20-21

- It is this power to love as God loves that defines us as Christians. This is what makes us unique. And like God's love to us, love coming into us from

God MUST then go out to others. This is the very nature of God's love: it moves outward. If when we are confronted as Samaritans, seeing the man in the ditch, we do not then respond with love, then we are not really who we think we are, who we claim to be. A life where our love is closed off to other people is a life where God is locked out as well.

- It is here that many outside the church will object. Humanism also teaches that we should love others and the humanist will quickly say here, "I do not need your God in order to love for my fellow human beings." Indeed they argue that their love is superior to that of the Christian love they have observed because they love everybody just as they are, without "hate", without trying to force people to change in order to fit our sense of morality. And frankly many humanists do good things to help others, often more effectively than does the church, which is to our shame.
- But in the end, love for others is based on a person's view of their worth: is the man in the ditch really worth my time and resources to stop and help the man? And this is where humanism fails in practice, for the highest evaluation of someone's worth is not found in humanism but found in the Biblical view of humanity. In truth, the highest evaluation of someone's worth is found on the cross of Christ. This man in the ditch is so loved by Christ that He died for him! Who am I to love the man less? Was not the man in the ditch also created in the image of God? Isn't he worth just as much to God as I am? Humanism argues that we are all equal, but only in Christ am I called to love others as Christ loves them, to serve them as Christ serves them, to lay down my life for them with Christ as my example. Whereas humanism will let them perish if that is what they choose to do, followers of Christ serve a God who desires that none perish, but are to be saved.
- Humanism also holds open the possibility of a middle ground in our relationship with others. Just live and let live seems like a plausible option. In Christ there is no middle ground. You either love your brother or you hate him. Live and let live is not an option for those who carry the cross of Christ. Bland neutrality toward others ultimately is bland neutrality toward

sin. Edmund Burke (or John Stuart Mill) is quite right when he said that “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” All one has to do is look at the early days of Nazi Germany or the deep South at the height of Jim Crow. No, says the Word of God, either you actively love people or you hate them. This is why the priest and the Levite, not the robbers, are the bad guys in the Samaritan story: not because they robbed and beat the man, but because they turned a blind eye and did nothing.

- God is never neutral or indifferent and as He is in us and we are in Him, we *CANNOT* be either. We simply *MUST* love “the brother we have seen”. God leaves us no other option. There is no middle ground, no third choice. Some may want to say, “Oh I do love the souls of all people.” But I can’t see a soul. I am to love the brother I have seen. Malcolm Tolbert puts it this way: “In Biblical terminology a person does not have a soul: he is a soul. This simply means he is a living being...(he may be) black or white, rich or poor, educated or illiterate...dirty, diseased, or badly mannered...Some of them are refined; some are uncouth. Some of them are washed; others may not bathe once a week. Some use deodorant, some have never purchased any in their lives...But God loves them all.”
- Growing up I had one brother. I did not choose him. I had no say so in the matter whatsoever. Yet my parents commanded that I love him and not just when it was convenient for me! The same is true in the family of God. We do not get to choose our brothers and sisters. We really have no say in the matter whatsoever. And our Father commands that we love our brothers and sisters. But he does not expect us to do so on our own. By His grace, He gives us the love we need to love, so that loving others is never a burden, but filled with grace and love + grace = joy.